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MEDIA INFORMATION

EAST TIMOR AUTONOMY PROPOSAL

A breakthrough in the East Timor conflict seems at long last possible as a result of recent developments.

Jose Ramos Horta, the Special Representative of CNRM, the East Timor Resistance institution, outlined a vision of how a peace proposal put forward by its Leader Xanana Gusmao could unfold.

Horta's plan, which he presented both at the European Parliament and the United Nations, includes three phases.

After initial talks leading to cessation of all armed activities in East Timor, a five year period of autonomous rule under Indonesian sovereignty would follow. During this phase, the duration of which may be extended to a total of ten years, East Timor would rule itself in most respects except for foreign relations, which would be conducted by Indonesia. Ultimately an act of self-determination would determine the final status of East Timor.

Support for the idea of autonomy for East Timor has been growing for some time among a variety of sectors in many countries. Politicians, academics, and other leaders of society have consistently expressed enthusiasm for such a possibility. Therefore, this recent plan has received enthusiastic support of a wide variety of sector in Europe, the US, Japan and Australia. It is seen as a practical way to restore the much desired peace and harmony to the region, which the East Timor conflict has disturbed for so long.

In Indonesia, support for a change of policy towards East Timor, and the possibility of autonomous status has also been evident in recent months, among some political leaders, journalists, academics, religious leaders and others.

Through such a solution, a major irritant could be removed. East Timorese leaders have often stated their desire to live in peaceful and harmonious relations as members of the regional family of the archipelago enjoying close cultural, social economic links with it. It can only be hoped that the latest proposal may point to the achievement of this aspiration, for the benefit of all involved.

Further information from: Jose Ramos Horta, tel: +351 1 932 7770, fax: + 351 1 534 009